

Tuesday March 3, 2009

Testimony of Ludwig Spinelli, CEO Optimus Health Care

Dear Members of the Human Service Committee

I am Ludwig Spinelli, CEO of Optimus Health Center, Inc. with sites in Bridgeport, Stratford and Stamford. During 2008 more than 43,000 unduplicated persons received care from our Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC).

My testimony today covers two issues in Gov. Rell's proposed budget. The first is the elimination of Medicaid Dental Coverage for adults. No doubt you have heard testimony from other providers and various dental groups. The facts are astounding. To save some \$25 million in expense, the state will eliminate care to the adults in the HUSKY A pool, membering some 75,000 persons. Each day our dental clinics in 4 sites with 27 chairs in Fairfield County open their doors at 8 am to treat their days "emergency" cases. More than 3 out of 4 cases are adults in pain unable to eat or sleep properly and subject to more serious infection.

It is also ironic in the past year FQHC's were given resources by the state to expand dental services. I now see this retreat as a knee jerk reaction due to a fiscal crisis the health safety net and their patients had no part of.

Please reconsider this cut.

Secondly is the requirement for various co-pays for HUSKY clients. Several years ago this was tried by DSS for a short period. Both safety net providers as well as pharmacists were to collect co-pays for certain Medicaid services such as primary care. It did not work then and I am certain it will not work in our Depression type climate. DSS revoked this requirement which only served as a barrier to care and was "eaten" by the providers. During these economic times, FQHC's can not bear the cost of such co-pays that our low income patients can not afford.

All you would be doing is forcing safety net providers to provide less care to those in need. Our mission is to provide access and should the patient not have the co-pay, they will receive care but at the expense of the FQHC or other providers.

Please seek other avenues to cut or raise revenue.